ness at the top was too marked, the dynasty was overthrown and a period of civil strife followed. This strife usually lasted for several decades and once, after the downfall of the Han, for several centuries. Military chieftains fought each other for the control of the Empire, often taking dynastic names and establishing ephemeral states, until one conquered all the others and succeeded in uniting the Empire under his sway and in passing the throne on to other members of his family. Had the Ch'ing survived, this rivalry might have been avoided or controlled. With the downfall of the Ch'ing, the traditional struggle between military leaders began again.

This time, however, the civil strife which had always been the interlude between dynasties was complicated by attempts at basic innovations in the form of government. Heretofore, after Ch'in Shih Huang Ti and the Han had devised machinery for ruling the Empire, each dynasty had been content to adopt, with modifications, the framework inherited from its predecessor. Even foreign conquerors had done this. When the Ch'ing fell, this was no longer possible. The new problems thrust upon the state by the coming of the West and the new ideas from abroad made imperative a reconstruction more revolutionary even than that of Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. No people has the political genius to work out a new system of government without experimentation and the attendant mistakes. Certainly new political machinery cannot be evolved for so large a mass as four hundred millions, most of whom are quite unprepared for the change, without costly failures. When, as in China, the attempt to devise a new type of government was complicated by strife between self-seeking mili-

tary chieftains, the result could not but be temporary chaos.

The breakdown of government was furthered by widespread corruption. Much of this existed under the Ch'ing, notably in the declining years of the dynasty. It bred a popular distrust of officialdom. When traditional controls were removed, the selfish use of political power for private profit was accentuated. This fostered rebellion and still greater lack of confidence in government.

Anarchy was accentuated by economic factors. Under the excellent government of the great Emperors of the Ch'ing, prosperity was marked and population multiplied. The disorders of the nineteenth century brought about no widespread economic breakdown